

Rwanda : separating myths from reality

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”Do Not Disturb : The Story of a Political Murder and an African Regime Gone Bad” by Michela Wrong (published by 4th Estate London, 2021).

’Of all the liars in Africa,’ wrote the English colonialist Ewart Grogan after visiting in 1899, ’I believe the people of Rwanda are by far the most thorough’. Grogan’s appalling quote is used in the introduction to Michela Wrong’s book, *Do Not Disturb : The Story of a Political Murder and an African Regime Gone Bad*. Not much has changed, the author believes. Rwandans are always telling her how mendacious they are : the country ’glories in its impenetrability’ and ’sees virtue in misleading’, Rwandan children are encouraged to develop the quality of deception. Michela Wrong admits that such a society poses a ’bit of a challenge’ for a non-fiction author.

The offensive paragraphs are reminiscent of the racism of Hutu Power, of the hate propaganda that por-

trayed Tutsi as natural-born liars, a part of the ideology that underpinned the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi. This is not a book ’about a genocide’, we are told, but a story of a group of exiled Rwandan fugitives, a ’small, tight-knit elite’. They seem to have been brought together by their loathing of the government of Rwanda and its President Paul Kagame – a sentiment the author shares.

Do Not Disturb purports to tell the story of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the army led by the current President of Rwanda Paul Kagame that chased the forces of Hutu Power from Rwanda, the genocidal extremists who had attempted to eliminate the minority Tutsi and are responsible for the murder of some one million people.

The primary subject is Patrick Karegeya, who became Rwanda’s external intelligence chief but fled Rwanda in November 2007. This was out of a concern for human rights abuses by former RPF comrades. No

mention is made of the corruption allegations he faced. Another special informant is Lieutenant-General Kayumba Nyamwasa, former Chief of Staff of the Rwandan Army who joined Karegeya in exile in South Africa in 2010.

Presented as an insightful and exclusive exposé, the book uses a novelistic style. There are flattering descriptions of Karegeya, his winning ways, his wicked sense of humour and she describes 'his skin was a smooth honey'. Michela Wrong feels unable to ask about his rumoured role in an extrajudicial murder in Nairobi at the height of his powers. 'How does anyone lightly broach the issue of someone's role in a murder over dinner?', she asks her readers.

Karegeya tells her he has lots of secrets, and she revels in tales of double agents who befriend the ex-spy, the wiretaps of plotters (using unscrambled telephone lines), the hitmen out to get him, fake police, and entrapment. The author claims tape recordings exist of former comrades planning his assassination, but there is scant evidence presented and no rigorous testing. No expert verification.

Both informants tell her they knew the deadly secret of the assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana, who had ordered the missiles to be fired that destroyed his Falcon jet as it came in to land on 6 April 1994. This milestone had si-

gnalled the start of the genocide. The exiles tell her that Paul Kagame was responsible, and she writes how this 'massive secret squats like a giant toad at the heart of the RPF story'. The narrative she presents is how a 'power-hungry rebel movement triggered the slaughter of its own people'.

To obtain confirmation of their claims, the author turned to French Judge Jean-Louis Bruguière, who for nine years had investigated the assassination, and announced in November 2006 that RPF commandos fired the missiles from a hillside known as Masaka some four kilometres from Kigali International Airport. The Bruguière thesis was eventually disproven using scientific and forensic data, but in this account the relevant report is hidden in a footnote, and revelations that the judge ignored critical evidence, neglected to call essential witnesses, distorted witness statements, and had a representative of Hutu Power on his payroll as a translator – all are absent.

The two French investigative magistrates who took over the dossier, even after a long interview with Nyamwasa at his request, eventually decided that the RPF had no case to answer. The Masaka theory is further discredited by experts from the UK's Cranfield Academy who demonstrated that the missiles had come from within a fortified military camp at Kanombe, closer to the airport and to

the crash site, and so certainly inaccessible to rebel fighters carrying missiles. The conclusion of Rwanda's own enquiry under Judge Jean Mutsinzi further confirmed Hutu Power extremists were to blame. Both reports are dismissed here in a paragraph.

In her enthusiasm to blame the RPF, Michela Wrong makes no mention of three witnesses who saw the missiles depart from Kanombe that night. One of them, Dr Massimo Pasuch, a Belgian military doctor, was close enough to hear the 'whoosh' of the missile fire. Acoustic evidence is crucial and the results of a scientific study in 2012 by French crash investigators, buried here in a footnote, show Kanombe camp the likeliest location for the assassins.

If the massive secret of the assassination does squat like a giant toad anywhere, it is likely to be in a prison cell in Mali. Here, the corpulent figure of Théoneste Bagosora is serving a 35-year sentence for genocide : a racist and violent Hutu Power ideologue, architect of genocide and not mentioned in this account as the prime suspect of the attack on the plane. To this day, Bagosora blames the assassination on the RPF. An RPF commando unit had accessed Masaka hill using an escort of peacekeepers from the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) who were in on the act. Bagosora had given information to Judge Bruguière

about missile launchers being found by a peasant quite by chance on Masaka hill.

The accusation against the RPF is an old story. It was used by the genocidaires in April 1994 even as their crime got underway to explain how the assassination of the President at the hands of the perfidious 'Tutsi RPF' had caused Hutu to rise up in anger, and that the killing of Tutsi was 'spontaneous'. A foundation stone of denial, and central to the defence of the genocide perpetrators in their trials, is the claim of a lack of planning.

Too late for this book but of potential use to the author are relevant sections in the recently released Duclert report, commissioned by President Emmanuel Macron to enquire into the role of France in the circumstances of the genocide. The Duclert report has a document dated 22 September 1994, from the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure, France's foreign intelligence and counterintelligence agency. The document concludes that the most plausible culprits for the assassination were Hutu Power military officers. They are named : Théoneste Bagosora, Laurent Serubuga, Leonard Nkundiye and Anatole Nsengiyumva. Interestingly, the Duclert report determined how the assassination had been subjected to constant efforts at disinformation.

Karegeya swore to the author that President Paul Kagame had ordered the downing of the plane. He said this was a grab at power, and Kagame was aware of the dangers that Tutsi civilians faced. He was no more than a ruthless tyrant willing to sacrifice his people and was now stifling dissent and assassinating his enemies. Yet Karegeya was after power for himself, and the book details the establishment of his political party in South Africa, the Rwandan National Congress (RNC). The author describes how the RNC established links with 'Hutu groups connected to the genocidal FDLR', and describes them as FDLR 'bogeymen', and she writes how this was seized upon by Kagame putting the Karegeya organisation 'beyond the pale'.

These are more than bogeymen. The FDLR, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, a US-designated terrorist group established to retake power in Rwanda in the name of 'Hutu People', includes fugitive Hutu Power genocidaires across the border in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Most of the Hutu Power leadership escaped in 1994 and are living in Western capitals financing terror movements intent on destroying the Rwandan Government. The author tells readers the FDLR is a 'spent force', and any danger from the 'Hutu opposition movement', or the 'Hu-

tu groups simmering with anti-RPF grievances' is dismissed. There is no mention of the Hutu Power movement, or its racist ideology crucial to Rwanda's history. Hutu Power does not even appear in the index.

Karegeya was found strangled in January 2014 in an upmarket Johannesburg hotel. Wrong blames Kagame but four suspects evaded trial and five years later at an inquest in Johannesburg, with no hard evidence or proof, a judge found the Rwandan Government responsible. The author believes that Karegeya should have had a state funeral in South Africa – which he did not receive. She equates his murder with that of Leon Trotsky, both men producing a 'credible opposition'.

General Nyamwasa survived a shooting in 2010 and four men were sentenced for attempted murder in South African courts. Today, he trains his own militia in the DRC, a 'loose coalition of both Hutu and Tutsi', Wrong asserts.

While numerous allegations are made against the Rwandan Government and its President, some old and familiar, scant evidence is offered here. To accuse a serving President of assassinating his predecessor would normally require what in Fleet Street, former heart of the UK's newspaper industry, was known as 'copper-bottomed' evidence. A different set of rules seems to apply when reporting

on Africa. A few disgruntled exiles telling tales and a reliance on a discredited dossier from a French magistrate is not adequate.

At the end of the book, the author questions the veracity of Rwanda's miraculous rebirth. And yet, as with the circumstances of the genocide of the Tutsi which she so casually

casts into doubt, the facts are capable of immediate verification with the use of reputable and public sources. This matters. It prevents myths turning into a reality.

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